



# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: REALITY, MYTH AND IDEAL

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## INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is one of the most discussed issues since the last few decades, and I think till now this issue attracts our attention more intensively than any time since it got the attention of social reformists and philosophers. In this paper I would like to reflect some of the lights of my reflection on women's empowerment to find out the inanity, which prevents the women's empowerment movement to be a successful one and I will try to provide a way out from that predicament from the philosophical perspective.

The notion of Women's Empowerment is a kind of movement, at least in part, against the deprivation of fundamental human rights of women and against gender-based violence as well. The movement is rapidly gathering its support, not only in the 'developed' countries, but also in the 'developing' and 'third world's countries' by the help of various international institutions, such as United Nation, United Nation Women, World Bank, World Health Organization etc. Worldwide pathetic and pitiful situation of women and girls as well, compels the conscience of people to speak for them- to assemble the support of the masses for the women's empowerment movement.

Women's empowerment can be defined in various ways- It can be defined to promote women's awareness of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, their right to influence the social changes for themselves and for other's as well. Moreover, we can say that women's empowerment is accepting the viewpoints of women while making decisions, and raising the status of them through education, awareness, training programs etc. In the history of women's empowerment movement we can recognize three phases, i.e., First phase began with the issue of women's suffrage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The second phase, which began in the 1960s, included the sexual revolution and the role of women in the society. And the third phase of it, we can recognize, in the form of Feminism in the 1990s.

Now let us try to apprehend the prime factors which played the pivotal role in the emergence of women's empowerment movement. For me, the foremost important factor, which shaken the conscience of the people, is the horrible situation of girls and women and the miseries they were going through. And obviously, there were socio-cultural, economic and political impulses behind their catastrophic situation. Let's have a glance on the terrible miseries of them-

1. According to the data provided by the United Nation, WHO, and the World Bank, in the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021, that

1 in 3 or more than 30% of women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual assault.<sup>1</sup>

2. Globally as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by their intimate partners.<sup>2</sup>
3. 'Globally 6% of women report having been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner, although data for non-partner sexual violence are more limited'.<sup>3</sup>
4. Even they are deprived of fundamental human rights- such as freedom from slavery, right to have property, right to participate in the cultural life, and freedom of expression etc. According to International Labour Organization 50 million people are in modern slavery<sup>4</sup>, more than 68% of them are women<sup>5</sup>.
5. Worldwide less than 20% of the total land is possessed by women<sup>6</sup>; due to dowry they didn't possess any share in the inheritance property.

The situation, in India, for the girls and women is not better than that of the rest of the world. According to the National Crimes Records Bureau, in India, crimes against women have increased by 87% from 2011 to 2021.<sup>7</sup> And it has been increased by 15.3% in 2021 compared to 2020. In West Bengal only 7.5% of Indian women lived while 12.7% of total crimes occur against women in India. Simultaneously, while 7.3% Indian women live in Andhra Pradesh but 11.5% crimes occur there against women. Not only in 'third world' countries, but also in 'developed' countries the position of women pleasing. According to WHO 'Over a quarter of women aged 15-49 years who have been in a relationship have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner at least once in their lifetime (since age 15). The prevalence estimates of lifetime intimate partner violence range from 20% in the Western Pacific, 22% in high-income countries and Europe and 25% in the WHO Regions of the Americas to 33% in the WHO African region, 31% in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region, and 33% in the WHO South-East Asia region.'

Dowry killing, honour killing, witchcraft killing, human trafficking, are very common crimes against women. According to Pew Research Centre, as many as 9 million females are missing from the Indian population in between 200 to 2019<sup>8</sup>. Female foeticide and infanticide is one of the catastrophic and horrible crimes commonly committed against women. Approximately 4.2 million to 12.1 million have been done in between 1980 to 2010 after they were identified as female. The foetal sex determination and sex selective abortion is now Rs 1000 cr. Industry<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, according to the NCRB data a rape

is being committed, in India, in every 20 minutes. It increased by 3% in between 2011-2012 and Incest rape increased by 46.8% in the period of time.

#### Steps taken to prevent violence against women

1. In 2019 UN Women, WHO, and 12 other UN and bilateral agencies published RESPECT to prevent crimes against women and to empower women worldwide. The full form of RESPECT is as follows:  
R : Relationship skill strengthening  
E : Empowerment of women  
S : Services ensured  
P : Poverty reduced  
E : Enabling environment  
C : Child and adolescent abuse prevented  
T : Transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms.
2. Since 2003 the world bank has supported 300 million dollars in various development projects and engaged with countries to support various projects, knowledge products etc. To eradicate gender-based violence.
3. It is unequivocally recognised, in the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995, that empowering people, especially women, to strengthen their own capacity is the main objective of development.
4. In the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993, gave immense emphasis in the full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social, regional and international level and in the eradication of all types of gender-based discrimination and violence.
5. In India, the Dowry prohibition Act was enacted on 1st May 1961. And there are very strict laws, like POCSO Act, in the Indian constitution to prevent women from various kinds of gender-based violence.
6. To empower women various kinds of schemes are run by the central government and state government, like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Kanyashree* etc.

#### Obstacles in the path of women empowerment

But the matter of concern is that despite all of those above-mentioned steps being taken to eradicate the crimes against women, nevertheless instead of empowering women and elimination of crimes against them is increasing day by day. A recognizable enhancement we are noticing in the participation of women in the field of education, politics, economics, science and technology, but simultaneously, crimes against them are increasing. But why? Where is the problem? Here are my observations- poverty<sup>10</sup>, discrimination in the wealth distribution<sup>11</sup>, denial of justice, lack of proper representation in the legislative assemblies, prejudice and blind faith, and confusion between and equal and identical rights<sup>12</sup>.

We have seen that, though a number of recognizable steps have been taken to empower women, across the globe that have charmed and attracted the global attention, nevertheless we have witnessed at the same time some very strong hindrances are also there in the path of women empowerment. We think that this is due to the weakness of the ideology which is the driven force of the 'global leader' who embarks continuously and loudly for the empowerment of women - who constitutes half

of the total population. Each and every act<sup>13</sup> of human beings are driven by at least a belief, if not knowledge. And this is the sole component of an ideology. For example, when we drive on the highway, at a certain speed, and we believe that we can control our vehicle at that certain speed if needed, no one will be coming from the wrong side, other fellow drivers also want to reach their destination safely like us and so on. If any of our beliefs becomes false, it might bring a horrific incident for us. Or you can analyse any act or event from your experience, you should find there at least a belief or a set of beliefs or ideology as the basis or driven force of that act or event. There is a very important link between the ideology and act; because of that link we can reach the act from the belief or ideology and vice-versa. For example, If I want some money (suppose 1 lakh) from you as debt, then you will give me that amount as a debt, for a certain period, only when you believe that I am capable of pay back the debt, in time, and I am honest enough to do that, and so on. And if you gave me that debt, then it implies that you have those beliefs about me. Similarly, if you deny giving that debt then it implies that you have a negative set of beliefs about me. This is the ultimate fact regarding your belief about me irrespective of whatever you *told* me and the *beautiful hospitality* or else you provide me. The same principle is being operative in each and every act. There is a very lucid and beautiful instance of it in the Indian Philosophy, i.e., *Carvaka*. According to a tradition, *Devaguru Brhaspati* introduced the *Carvaka* ideology among the Asuras to make them weak as the opponent of the Deities, who defeated the deities several times. And it is done in a very beautiful and 'sweet tongued'<sup>14</sup> to have mass acceptance and they succeed<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, if one believes that every member of the society will participate in the production according to their merit with their utmost effort, the participation will not be equal. But in this situation if the 'governor' gives every participant the same and equal remuneration then why does a person give more effort in the production than his/her fellow citizens? The inevitable implication of it is decrease in production and hence the annihilation of the society. And we have witnessed it. Similarly, if one believes that there is no place, in the society, for those who are weak<sup>16</sup>, then he/she must advocate for the mass destruction and carnage to make the world for the 'stronger'<sup>17</sup>. That's why feminist like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth C. Stanton advocated with their utmost effort for the 'rights' of women on one hand and on the other hand they opposed altogether the suffrage of Afro-American people. Why? Afro-American women are not women to them? Or is there something wrong with it? Margaret Sanger, one of the icons of the feminists, advocates for the wipe out of 'unfit' people from America; and this number is huge, i.e., almost 85% of the total population of America. And she criticised all those who worked in favour of those 'unfit' people. And she unequivocally supported foetus killing and abortion of those unfit people<sup>18</sup>. Why? Are they not women? Are they not human beings? Why should only the elite 'fittest' have the privilege?

At the end of our discussion, we can conclude that women empowerment is the need of the hour, demand of the conscience and duty of humanity to work for them, but it is not possible unless the eradication of the above-mentioned obstacles. Annihilation of hypocrisy on the basis of a strong ideological

basis and the modest and honest character is of utmost importance for the empowerment of women as well as for the entire human race and hence that of the society. We need to find out such a strong ideology which can transform human beings from the inside. Void seminars, discussions, publicity stunts or advertisements would not be helpful to empower women; rather it will expose the hidden inconsistency and wangle of the 'global leaders', obviously not to everyone but to those who have earned the ability to see behind the scene learned to detect the inconsistency. With unrestricted capitalism, fascist political ideology and consumerist philosophy of life, slogan of women empowerment can't bring any positive result except a wane.

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- one-in-every-130-females-globally-is-living-in-modern-slavery-un-report/story-VAVHGWAg8EMmCszl0YZZgO.html
- <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/women-own-less-than-20-of-the-worlds-land-its-time-to-give-them-equal-property-rights/>
- 228650 in 2011 and in 2021 it reached 428720.
- [the wire.in/women/india-missing-girls-sex-ratio-infanticide-pew-analysis](https://www.thewire.in/women/india-missing-girls-sex-ratio-infanticide-pew-analysis/) The wire, 6th September, 2022
- <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-777-the-evil-of-female-feticide-in-india-causes-consequences-and-prevention.html>
- Poverty is one of the prime reasons for crime. Hence 'Countries with high rates of economic deprivation tend to witness higher crime rates than other countries. Since people do not have the means to secure a living in the right ways, they invest their time in criminal activities to earn their livings. And for the criminals' women are easier targets. And discrimination of wealth is one of foremost responsible causes of poverty. More than 700 million people live in extreme poverty. And 'The global extreme poverty rate reached 9.3 percent, up from 8.4 percent in 2019.' 19% of the total population is living multidimensional poverty only in 111 developing countries. According to the UN 'Each day, 25,000 people, including more than 10,000 children, die from hunger and related causes. Some 854 million people worldwide are estimated to be undernourished, and high food prices may drive another 100 million into poverty and hunger. [<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/losing-25000-hunger-every-day#:~:text=Each%20day%2C%2025%2C000%20people%2C%20including,million%20into%20poverty%20and%20hunger.>]
- The poorest half of the total population of the globe, have only 8.5% of the total wealth of the world, while the richest 10% grab 52% of it[1]. After the Covid-19 pandemic this discrimination increased as unprecedented. According to Oxfam International 'The richest 1 percent grabbed nearly two-thirds of all new wealth worth \$42 trillion created since 2020, almost twice as much money as the bottom 99 percent of the world's population earned'[2]. It also mentioned that "The billionaire class is \$2.6 trillion richer than before the pandemic,"[3] In India the situation is worse than that of the average discrimination of the globe. Here, in India, 'the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1%, while 670 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their wealth.'[4] And professor Himanshu, Jawaharlal University, told, in this context, that "What is particularly worrying in India's case is that economic inequality is being added to a society that is already fractured along the lines of caste, religion, region and gender."
- 'Equal' and 'Identical' these terms neither have the same sense nor have the same reference, but these two terms are generally used in the same parlance while discussing the rights of men and women. It is obvious that women and men constitute the same humanity and therefore, as a human being they have equal status. But as far as naturally they are different, their duties and responsibilities should be different. In a few cases women have supremacy over men and in a few other cases men have supremacy over women. None of them is complete without the other. But at the end of the day both of them are equal and none is superior or inferior to the other. Without having a proper and clear concept of it, women's empowerment is not only impossible, rather it could ruin the family which is the source of the power. Hence, that will throw isolated men and women into the 'mouth' of cunnings, who want to use them as their slaves.
- 'Act' in the sense of 'moral act' in the language of moral

## FOOTERNOTES

- <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women> ( 9th March 2021)
- Ibid.
- Ibid.
- [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_855019/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_855019/lang-en/index.htm)
- Females outnumber males as victims of modern slavery in four of the five world regions. They account for 73% of victims in the Asia and Pacific, 71% in Africa, 67% in Europe and Central Asia, and 63 % in the Americas, the UN report states. *Hindusthan Times*, 12th October 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/>

philosophy or Ethics.

14. Hiriyanna, M. Outlines of Indian Philosophy, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1993, p. 187.
15. The fundamental of their contention was “Yavatjivet sukhamjivet rinam kritva ghritam pibet, Bashmibhutasya dehasya puranagmanm kutah”.
16. Doctrine of the ‘Survival of the fittest’.
17. ‘Fittest’ in their language.
18. Lewis, B., Feminist Propaganda, trans, Maimuna, F., Guardian Publication, Dhaka, pp. 19-36.